Mekong Community Media Project · Mekong-Lanna Natural Resources and Culture Conservation Network

Local Cultural Ecology and Natural Resource Management in the Mekong Basin

A Case Study of The MaeKhong River-Lanna Area

"เขื่อนไม่ช่วยป้องกันน้ำท่วมและยิ่งซ้ำเติมให้แห้งแล้งมากขึ้น"

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This article is a primary conclusion of cultural ecology -based natural resources management of the Mekong-Lanna Natural Resources and Culture Conservation Network. We wrote this article with our existing wisdom, ability, and time in expectation that in the future our wisdom will increase. We would like to thank all local people and local leaders who have shared joy and sorrow

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Finally, we would like to thank all co-workers within the Network, who have worked with heart and head without dispirit and worked happily despite we lack money.

With respect for nature and faith in human equality

The Rak Chiang Khong Conservation Group

2009, on the Mekong River banks-Wiang Chiang Khong

Local Cultural Ecology and Natural Resource Management in the Mekong Basin

A Case Study of The MaeKhong River-Lanna Area

Abstract

"Local Cultural Ecology and Natural Resource Management in the Mekong Basin" is a synthetic article obtaining informations from the working experience of The Mekong-Lanna Natural Resource and Cultural Conservation Network, research preparing by villagers; com munity-base research projects; the group's publications and its activity of restoring natural resources and local culture in The MaeKhong River-Lanna area, which otherwise called Ing-Kok basin and Mekong riverbanks. Its aim is to study the situation from past to the present originated

by the resource management of the state which is guided by economical-profited attitude policy. That kind of management has destroyed a great amount of natural resources of local communities and country. However, the government has hardly given aid to the marginal areas at the end of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong Riverbanks. Most of benefits and aids directly flow towards the capital; in contrast with the rural areas which are not beneficial any. Nevertheless, people living in there have sustained their lives. How do they achieve it despite the fact that economically-base development is spreading around the world.

Regarding for this issue, From sharing opinions; researching; collecting data for over half a decade, it has been revealed that economically-profit attitude natural resource management is not a correct. If the purpose is to realize the equality and sustainability within the society, the management should be led by the principle of cultural ecology. The aged generation also achieved the collective management of natural resources by means of code, e.g., (Mangrai Sastra) (or Mangrai laws) and therefore, the preservation of nature.

Introduction

Yuans, Laos, Thais name Mekong River Mae Nam Khong. It begins in Tibet, runs through seven countries : namely, China (Yunnan); Myanmar ; Lao ; Thailand and Cambodia and reaches to the South China Sea at Vietnam. A myriad of ethnicities, for almost of 100 millions, lives in the area where the river passes. Here is the land of prominent civilizations, including Sip Song Panna, Lanna, Lancang, and mostly important, Ancient Khmer.

In case of Lanna, the region where the river passes through is a physical area of the Kok-Ing Basin and the Mekong Riverbanks which currently situate in Chiang Rai and some recently overlapping areas of Lanna and Lancang, which is now Lao PDR's Bo Kaeo Province. There is a many diverse ethnic groups, e.g., Yuan, Lao, Lue, Kamu, Yao, Mong, Haw-Chinese, Lahu, Aka, Shan, Yong and Karen, etc. These groups have had a close relationship with each other for a long time. Ancient cities situating in this area include Chiang Saen, Chiang Khong, Chiang Rai, Thoeng, and Phayao.

Areas mentioned above relates to the diversity of men, who commutes via mountain ridges and streams. There have been relations between men and nature, since livelihoods depended on forest, water, and soil; and between men and the supernatural, resulting in animism, religions, and beliefs or rules for collective living. All of these generate the word 'cultural ecology', which in short is a relationship, a connection between men; between men and nature; and between men and the super-natural. Following section is about the cultural ecology at the end of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong Riverbanks, which is the representation of the Mea Khong River-Lanna.

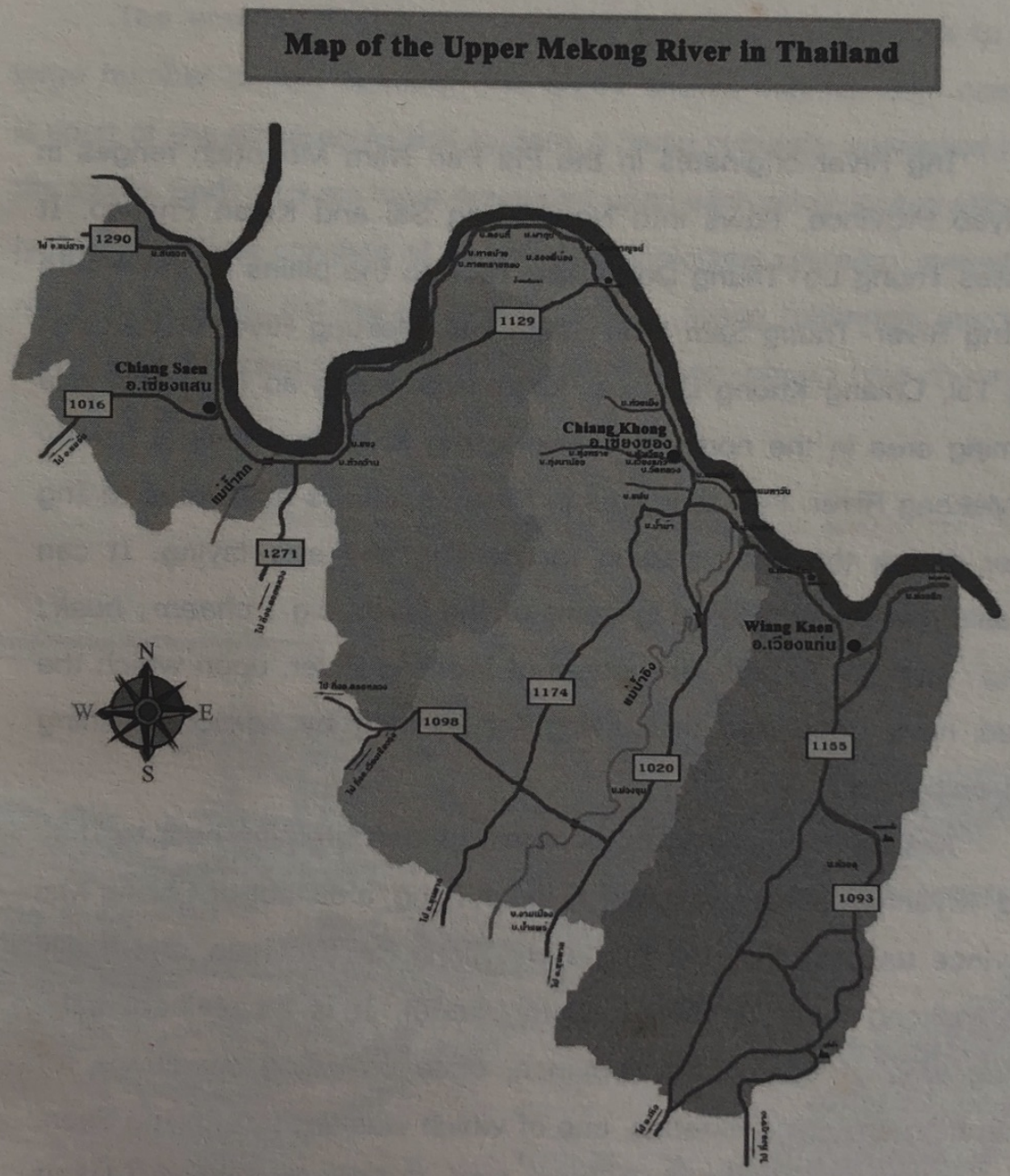


Figure 1 Map of the Upper Mekong River in Thailand

Cultural Ecology at the End of the Ing - Kok Basin and the Mekong Riverbanks

Ing River originates in the Phi Pan Nam Mountain ranges in Phayao Province, flows into Nong Leng Sai and Kwan Phayao. It passes Thung Lo-Thung Dok Kham Tai into the plains of the mouth of Ing River-Thung Sam Mon; then into Mekong River at Ban Pak Ing Tai, Chiang Khong District. Apart from being an important rice farming area in the north of Thailand, Ing River is a natural fishery of Mekong River. Fish that lives in Mekong always evacuates to Ing River during the flood season for hunting and egg-laying. It can be said that the ecological systems of Ing River, e.g.; *chaem*; *buak*; *nong*; and wet forests, are womb of Mekong River, upon which the locals have depended their living for so long by seasonal fishing and cultivation.

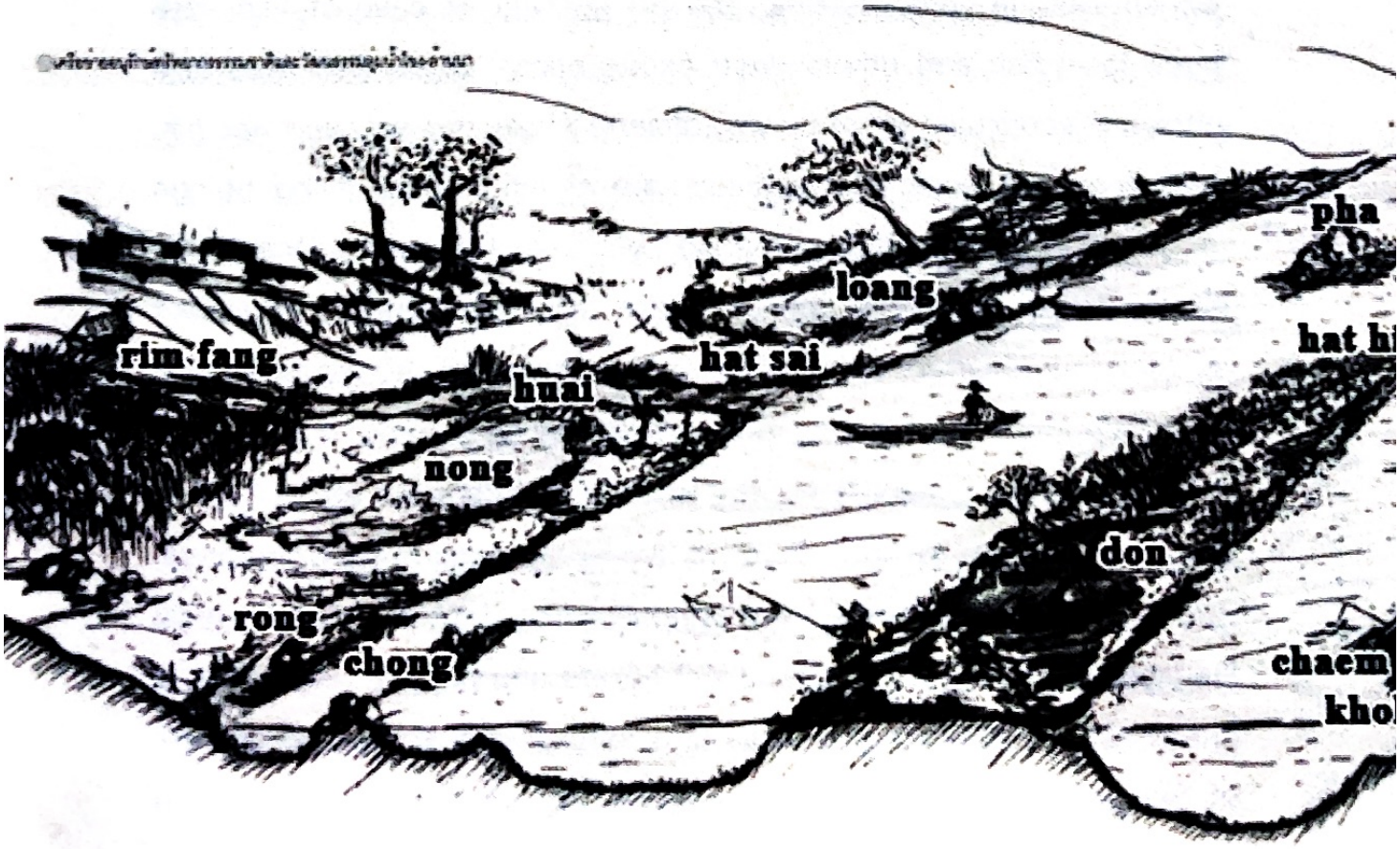
Kok River originates in mountain ranges situating near to Thailand-Myanmar border. It flows, through Fang, a district of Chiang Mai Province towards the vast plains of Chiang Rai Province, and finally into Mekong River at Chiang Saen District. It is an eminent cultivating area of Chiang Rai Province, once providing conditions for generating ancient civilization, one of which was ancient Chiang Saen.

Both sides of Mekong River from Golden Triangle in Chiang Saen District to Kaeng Pha Dai in Wiang Kaen District are 124 kilometers long. Its northmost part is an open waterway with islands alternating with sand beaches. The middle prior to reach Chiang Khong, has got many *kau pha* and *kau hat*, and complex ecological systems. This area is called the Khon Phi Long; its deepest part

is in the north side of the Pha Phra, which is approximately over 50 metres deep. At the end, the mouth of Ing River has got sand beaches alternating with reefs until the river reaching at Pha Dai.

The ecological systems in Khon Phi Long contributes to a large number of fish species. The study shows that its local name is apart of the entire ecological system, a name culturally addressed by the locals. Both of them have depended upon each other systematically. Mekong River consists of eleven sub-ecological systems ; namely, *rim fang* (bank), *hat* (beach), *huai* (creek), *loang* (channels unconnected to the main river), *nong* (swamp), *rong-chong* (the channel

Figure 2 Ecological Systems of Mekong River at Khon Phi Long



connected to the main river found during the dry season), *khok* (deep hole and whirlpool), *chaem* (a piece of land that sticks out into the river), *don kau* (reef), *pha* (river cliff), and *kwan* (river bend) as in *Figure 2.*

Ecological systems generate lives and living. Each of them contributes to living beings in a relative and different manner. The systems have relations with seasonal tides. The tide starts rising in May, when fish lays eggs. Locals can catch fish during July - August, when the tide is at its high. Until September - October, the tide starts to decrease and the water becomes dry during March - April. Water seasons having relations with the ecological systems result in a large amount of fish and plants types. According to the studies hold by local researchers from 2003 to 2004, there were over 65 species, in case of plant, and 96 species, in case of fish, (86 were local fish and others were exotic ones). Some fish lives in a different ecological system, e.g. *chaem, khok, hat sai, and hat hin.* Therefore, the ecological systems are significant for living beings in Mekong River, which comprises of many tributaries. Despite of having fewer ecological systems, the tributaries are as important as Mekong River. A study shows that there are 20 kinds of fish evacuating into the Mekong River for laying eggs and living. One of them is Mekong giant catfish, the world one. There are also 54 kinds that migrate from Mekong River to live or lay eggs in the tributaries.

Ecological systems have various name differentiated by local landscapes, fisherman - calling, local beliefs and history. 'Pha Phra' is one of fittest instances, for *pha* is a very unique ecological system of Mekong River residing in this region. It is a rock or a great pile of rocks always found a deep channel nearby : those rocks emerge during dry season, and with in it, a plant called *krai*, or *Homonoia*

riparia Lour in Latin, covers their surface. During flood season, some of that mentioned plant would submerge. After decaying, it would feed fish. 'Pha Phra', which situates at the north of Ban Muang Kan besides Lao, is a rock upon which Buddha image was carved. Once upon a time, according to a local folktale these was a Laotian king's son bearing a monk status rode on a boat downward Chiang Saen. His boat hit those piles of rocks and then sank. That incident cost his life. Afterward, this Pha was carved in memorial of that monk. Pha Phra does reflect more or less historical relations between Lanna and Lancang.

In addition for the fact that ecological systems are different, it caused inevitably the difference of living and growth in fish, aquatic plants. Local men take advantages of this different in their fishing by means of different and seasonal fishing instruments. They possess knowledge of catching several kinds of fish. It has been proved by the fact that they have 71 types of local-made fishing gears designed by the oriented intention of usage appropriate to the different sub-ecological systems and fish nature of each kind. They are divided into fish- trapping, fish-temping, fish-catching, and aid-catching gears. Within a dry or low-tide season, men will put *khang* (คั่ง) along the tributaries, because fish still remaining in the ponds will swim downward the tributaries and go towards Mekong River. Since October to April, fish would live in *khok*, herein use the fisherman their cast net, *mong* (มอง), and fishhook for catching them. During high-tided season, fish would evacuate to another place, fishermen would use *sailan* (ไซลั่น) or *lai mong* (ไหลมอง) along *lang*. Apart from adjusting the fishing gears according to the ecological systems, fish types, or water seasons, local fishermen observe some natural signs that indicates him the

coming of fish season. When fig tree fruits, for example, begin to ripe, it indicates that *pla mong*, or *Pangasius conchophilus* in Latin, is coming, swimming an upstream.

There is however in each space, a public fish-catching area called *'lang'* or *'luang'*. It is a place collectively exploited and protected. A period has been set, for example, within which allows the fisherman to look after their *lai mong* and dredge it at *lang*. There is also a ceremony of 'Wai Phi Luang' and 'Wai Phi Nam' (water spirits). This resources management involves with rules and beliefs of the supernatural. It reflects local respect of nature. This relationship later

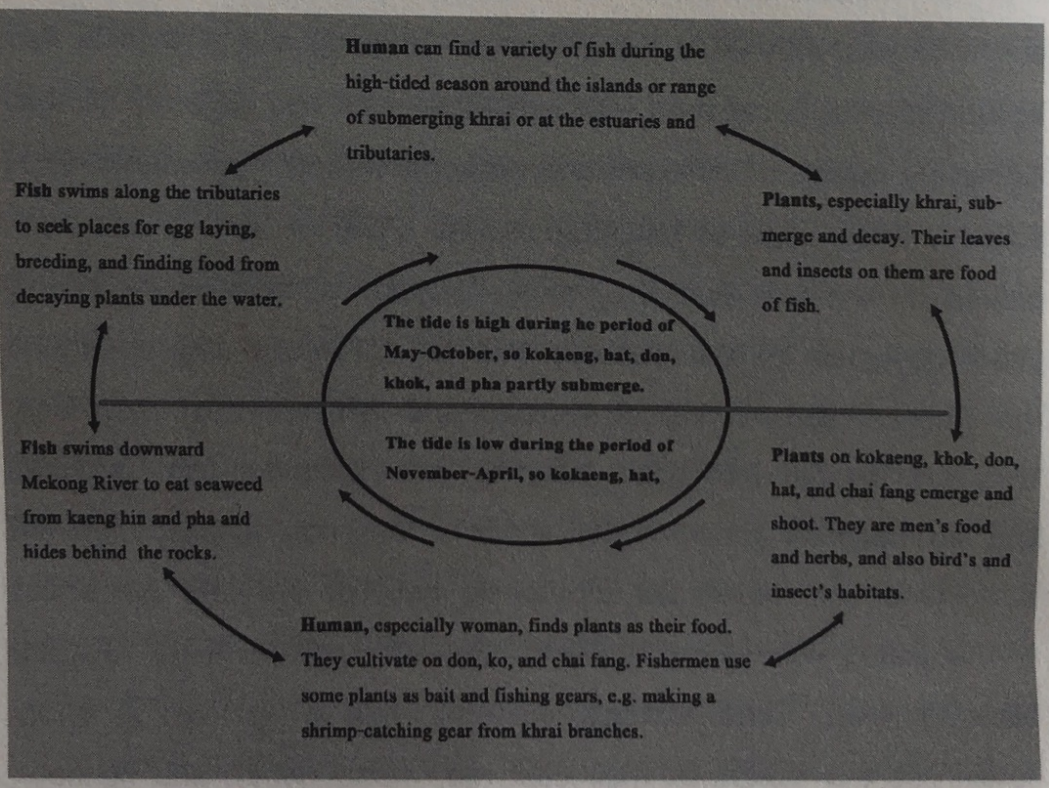

Human can find a variety of fish during the high-tided season around the islands or range of submerging khrai or at the estuaries and tributaries.
Fish swims along the tributaries to seek places for egg laying, breeding, and finding food from decaying plants under the water.
Plants, especially khrai, submerge and decay. Their leaves and insects on them are food of fish.
The tide is high during he period of May-October, so kokaeng, hat, don, khok, and pha partly submerge.
The tide is low during the period of November-April, so kokaeng, hat,
Fish swims downward Mekong River to eat seaweed from kaeng hin and pha and hides behind the rocks.
Plants on kokaeng, khok, don, hat, and chai fang emerge and shoot. They are men's food and herbs, and also bird's and insect's habitats.
Human, especially woman, finds plants as their food. They cultivate on don, ko, and chai fang. Fishermen use some plants as bait and fishing gears, e.g. making a shrimp-catching gear from khrai branches.

Figure 3 The Ecological Systems of Mekong River around Chiang Saeng, Chiang Khong, and Wiang Kaen

develops into a cultural one between communities of the both sides of Mekong River. They join the auspicious ceremonies, like 'Wai That'

(expressing respect for a stupa containing relic, of Buddha). According to the study, there are 10 *lang* in Mekong River-Lanna region.

The *lang* that has long been a case, and attracted to academics, and people in general is *lang-luang*, at Don Waeng , Ban Hat Khrai -the place for catching Mekong giant cat fish. It is a particular ecological system where folks could catch Mekong giant cat fish once a year (during dry season–April-May) because that time, seems to the fish, is an appropriate one to swim through the channels. It is impossible to do so if the amount of water is too little. But if water level is much higher than those of the channels, the fish can swim deeply and through other channels. In addition, for the reason that fish-catching methods has been transmitted by generations, its wisdom has been preserved in the ceremony of *Wai Phi* (paying homage to the spirit),as one fisherman said, "Mekong giant cat fish is ghost's fish. We can't hunt them unless we ask *phi*". That respected *phi* is *phi luang* or *phi yai*. It believed that phi would reveal that each year how many giant catfish would be catched. And that *Wai Phi* ceremony held by fishermen ties them with a close relation.

The ecological system of tributaries, Ing River, for instance, is a wetland comprising variety of sub-ecological systems, such as *pha, nong, buak,* and *chaem*. The exploitation of those areas has been determined by some rules originating in folk beliefs: setting feet on the spring residing in *'chaem'* is prohibited because of its offense against *phi*. The ecological systems of wetland forests are different. During dry season, the forests are used for raising animals, but during flood season, they become fish habitats. Fishing gear usage is adjusted according to each ecological system and season, all of which are consequently determination of local livelihood and natural resource exploitation. Natural resource management in present time is influ-

Economically - based Natural Resources Management

Economically - based natural resources management was introduced into the GMS countries in the colonial period. It did not affect communities in general much until 1961. Since then, the environmental and natural resources management in Thailand mostly has depended on the 1st National Economic and Social Development Plan.

Although the end of the Ing - Kok Basin and the Mekong River banks, marginal areas of Thailand, have been part of Thailand (Siam at that time) since 1914, local people have depended on natural resources and have managed soil and forest resources based on cultural ecology. In 1975 - 1981, the area is a marginal battlefield of fighting between the Communist Party of Thailand and the Thai government. This did not cause many changes in cultural ecology. However, there was construction of strategic roads on the plains and highland areas and evacuation of some ethic groups, e.g. Mong, Yao, and Lahu, from highland areas to the plains to compete for the mass. This is also the starting point of construction of infrastructure, e.g. roads. However, farming and fishery were based on cultural ecology.

Agricultural and fishery production was changed to commercial economy from 1989, when Lao launched the open - door policy, and Thailand initiated the policies to transform the battlefield into a trade field. This border area was an investment base in neighboring countries. Mono - cropping agriculture and chemical agriculture were introduced to highland areas. There was an emergence of rice

farming for trading, whereby chemicals were utilized for increasing rice productivity in the Nam Ing Basin Plains as well as tourism industries selling cultures of northern people and ethnic minority groups. All these were oriented to marketing and profits. The government's centralized management and unilateral problem solving led to an increase in land trading, chemical agriculture, tourism promotion, and tourism management mainly in response to businesses.

However, the effects of the government policies on natural resources management according to local people occurred from 2001. That is, free trade policies of the government and trans-state organizations, especially the Project "Commercial Navigation on the Lancang-Mekong", which is generally called the Project "Mekong Rapids Blasting for Commercial Navigation" among China, Myanmar, Lao and Thailand. This project is part of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Plan and the Thailand-China Free Trade Plan. Academics and the government viewed that rapids in the Mekong River are obstacles to development, which should be blasted to allow large-scale commercial ships. Whilst local people viewed that they

Figure 4 The Mekong Rapids Blasting in the North of the Golden Triangle

are the habitats of fish and sources of living beings in the Mekong River. The government and academics' views are like those of French colonists, who regarded rapids and reefs as something that should be dynamited to do trade with China.

The project was pushed by the Chinese government according to the Yunnan's Southward Policies. Meanwhile, the Thai government made an agreement with the four countries without considering local communities or considering that the state sovereignty is constituted by people and although the government comes from election, making decisions or agreements with other states shall be approved by people in the state as well. The project was aimed at blasting the Mekong rapids from Si Mao to Sipsong Panna in Yunnan through the Myanmar - Lao Border, the Golden Triangle, and the Thailand - Lao Border to Luang Prabang. It was likely to be extended to the mouth of the Mekong River. It consists of three phases. The last phase deals with making the Mekong River as a water conveyance canal for 500 - ton navigation, of which China was the main supporter in term of investment in research and blasting of the Mekong rapids.

This project was retarded at the second stage, which is above the Golden Triangle - Chiang Saen upwards. The section of the Thailand - Lao Border from the Golden Triangle - Pha Dai, Wiang Kaen District was protested against by people living on the Mekong River banks and local communities mainly due to the fact that the divide line in the Mekong River between Thailand and Lao was not clear, which originated in the French Colonial Period. Blasting the Mekong rapids makes natural check dam disappear, thus causing changes in water channels, bank erosion, increase beach and sand bars in the middle of the Mekong River. The project officers stated that the project was stopped at the Golden Triangle because the borderline

issue had not been solved yet, but local people living on the Mekong River bank expressed through villager's research that the government should attach great importance to cultural ecology systems in the Mekong River as abovementioned because they render food security as rapids, reefs, and other ecological systems in the Mekong River are the habitats of seaweed and fish and are natural dams during the flood season, which prevent the erosion of the Mekong River banks which are agricultural areas. Therefore, destroying the habitats is destroying the lifestyles of people on the Mekong River banks. The Mekong River is the last public area where people on both sides of the Mekong River can share natural resources because most land on the plains was sold and encroached on, and highland areas become national reserved forests. This last cultural ecological area has relations with food security and state sovereignty because it is on the borderline.

This is a significant case study for further projects in the future, which suggests that there is a need to study and pay attention to cultural ecology systems of local communities and to understand existing cultural ecology-based natural resources management in each locality and the diversity of communities in the Mekong River apart from the word 'development', another name of 'capitalism', which is focused on attaining utmost benefits from the lowest costs and passing on a burden of natural, cultural, and social costs to other people.

Blasting the Mekong rapids in China has effects on people living on the Mekong River banks in the Thailand-Lao Border areas. The effects reaffirms the study and concern of local people that this project is not cost-effective, and navigation cannot be done all year round as planned although the navigation channels were made through blasting the Mekong rapids in the north of Thailand. This is

because navigation is more difficult during the dry season because there are no more navigation channels, and bank erosion lead to new bars. These are the reasons why blasting the Mekong rapids does not lead to all-year-round navigation. The road R3A from Kunming -Chiang Rung-Bo Ten Bo Han, Luang Nam Tha-Bo Kaeo, which connects to a road in Thailand in Chiang Khong by the Fourth Thai-land-Lao Friendship Bridge, trading by automobiles will be more important and have long-term cost-effectiveness. The Thai government has a project of constructing a new large-scale port to support ships from China at the mouth of the Kok River in Chiang Saen District. Economically, it is not cost-effective in comparison to the lost resources because shipping in the Mekong River is now less important. Meanwhile, the public area of marginal people and natural resources in the Mekong River, which are a source of living of fishermen and poor people, has been destroyed.

As for economically-based development, apart from blasting of the Mekong rapids, there is construction of hydropower dams to produce electricity for industrial sector or the city as well as construction of dams for large-scale commercial ships. All these result in changes in waterways and bank erosion, which results in an increase in sand bars and dryness in the dry season so that there is closing and opening water at the upstream part of the dam to allow all-year-round navigation. This makes the tide cycle unnatural. According to the study, local people and fishermen confirmed that tide of the Mekong River is no longer seasonal. That is, there are rapid fluctuations of the water height within a week, which confuses fish in spawning and causes the seaweed, main food of fish, especially the Mekong giant cat fish, to be dry and decay when submerging. It grows in water with a depth of 50 cm, but if it is

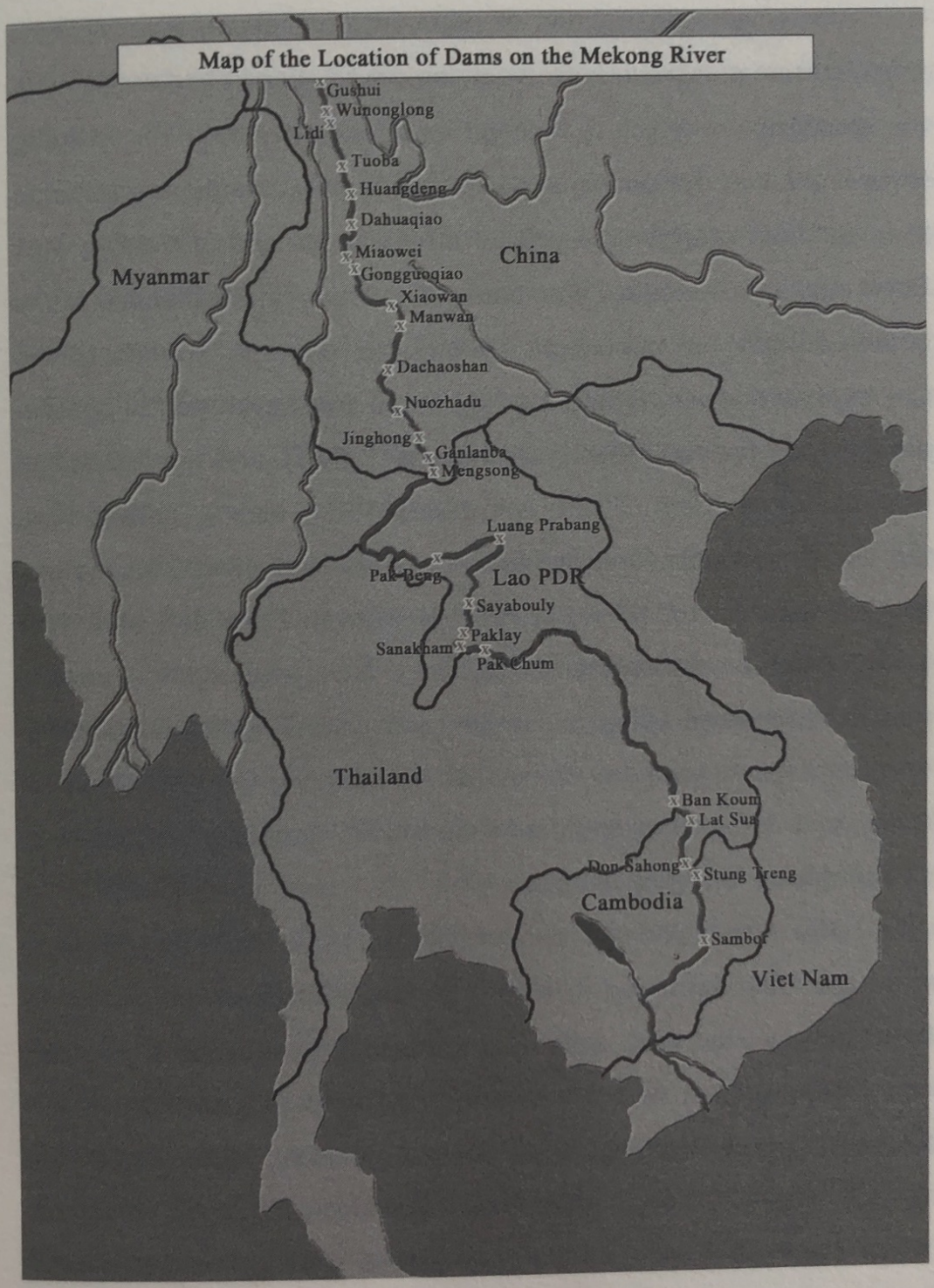


Figure 5 Locations of Dams on the Mekong River

in water at a shallower or deeper depth, it will die or decay, thus substantially decreasing the number of fish and plants.

However, construction of dams in the Mekong River reflects trans-state natural resources management to support the economy in the globalization, which is focused on liberal economy. The Mekong River is the river for people in seven countries as mentioned although they call it differently. The project affecting the end of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River banks in a trans-state manner is the construction of at least eight hydropower dams in Yunnan of the Chinese government. There are four dams that have been in service, namely the Manwan (1996), Dachaoshan(2003), and the fast speed namely Jinhong Dam (2009) is located 345 km above Thailand from the Golden Triangle, and the fourth dam is high giant 300 meters, biggest dam on the Mekong River is Xiowan Dam. It's start first power plant on September 2010. They have affected the cultural ecology of people living midstream and downstream substantially. The Chinese government views that the Mekong River in China (in Chinese, it is Lancangjiang), is in the Chinas' sovereignty; therefore, China can do anything with it.

The effects on the end of the Ing-Kok Basin and Mekong riverbanks first appeared in 1996 after the Manwan Dam started to be in service. That year, water in the Mekong River became unusually dry. After the other two dams were officially opened, the fluctuations of water in the Mekong River became unusual, especially at the section where Mekong rapids were blasted on the China-Myanmar -Lao Border. Allowing ships from China during the dry season aggravates the crisis of unusual tides. The fluctuations of water will be so fast that fishermen cannot read the streams based on their local wisdom, and the unusual water fluctuations affect seaweed,

one of the food cycle of fish and other aquatic animals. If the seaweed disappears or dies, the life cycle of fish will be unusual and the number of fish and kinds of fish will be reduced, which is also caused by wrong fishing methods. Disconnecting or destroying the food chain of the ecological system in the Mekong River is a significant cause of this. It is found that fishermen in some villages had to change their lifestyles. The fish-catching channels stringing communities from the north of the Golden Triangle to Lao disappeared. Many communities, e.g. Ban Huai Luek and Ban Pak Ing Tai, had to adjust themselves to the mono-cropping system. Because there is a limitation of agricultural land, and clearing new land is impossible, they have to move to a big city.

Dam construction always coexist with the statement "The dam prevents dryness in downstream areas during the dry season and prevents flooding during the flood season". However, since the three dams in the Upper Mekong River were first in service, it has been very dry during the dry season. But dam supporters, especially the Chinese government, reasoned that this phenomenon results from the overall environmental changes of the world; they do not admit that dams are a significant factor of the dryness of the Mekong River. The heavy flooding at the end of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River banks from 9-15 August 2008 is a good lesson and significant witness of the heaviest flooding for a 40-year period in the downstream areas in China. It was reported that there had been a heavy flooding at the upstream part of the dam of China, which killed 40 people, and over 100 thousand people had to evacuate from the disaster-risk areas. When there was a lot of water at the upstream part of the dams and a lot of people were killed, China opened the dam to release water downstream. The end of the Ing-Kok Basin and the

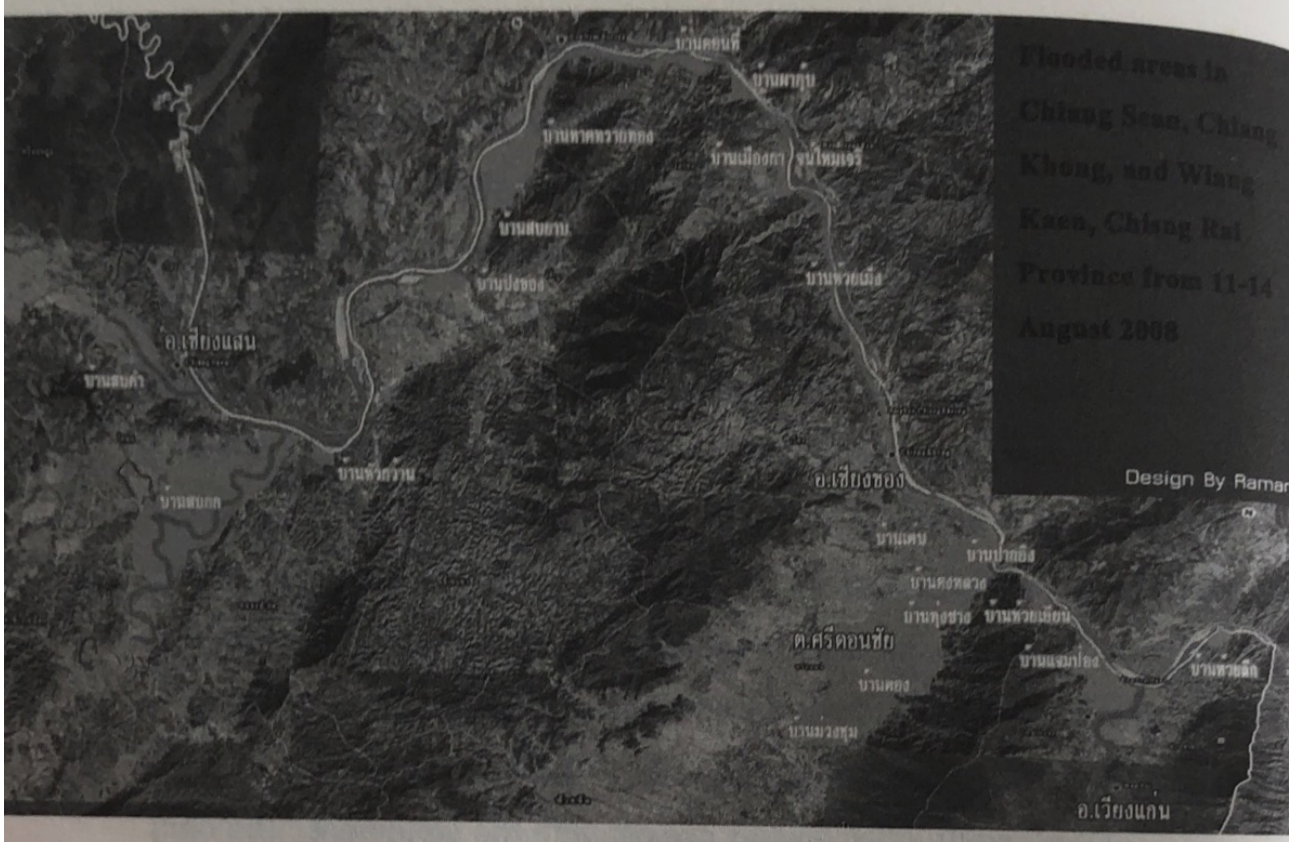

Flooded areas in Chiang Saen, Chiang Khong, and Wiang Kaen, Chiang Rai Province from 11-14 August 2008
Design By Ramar
อ.เชียงแสน
อ.เชียงของ
อ.เวียงแก่น
ต.ศรีดอนชัย

Figure 6 Flooded Areas in Chiang Saen, Chiang Khong, and Wiang Kaen in 2008

Mekong River banks is the first plain in the south of China. The water in the Mekong River which increased rapidly for almost two meters reversed from the mouth of the Kok-Ing River to the waterway for almost 30 km. There was no report on the amount of rainwater flowing from the upstream Kon-Ing River. In addition, there were data from the gauging station at Jinhong that the accumulated of water for one week was over 1,400 mm. On 6 August 2008, the water flow traveled from Jinhong to Chiang Saen, taking around five days, whilst the level of water in the Mekong River in Chiang Saen rose to 10.68 m at 6 pm from 11-12 August 2008.[2] This confirms that the flooding

2 Summary of the water levels in the Mekong River (AHNIP), Chiang Saen Hydrological Survey Center 12, Water Resources Regional Office 1, Department of Water Resources, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2008.

Figure 7 The Jinhong Dam, Located 345 Km in the North of Thailand.

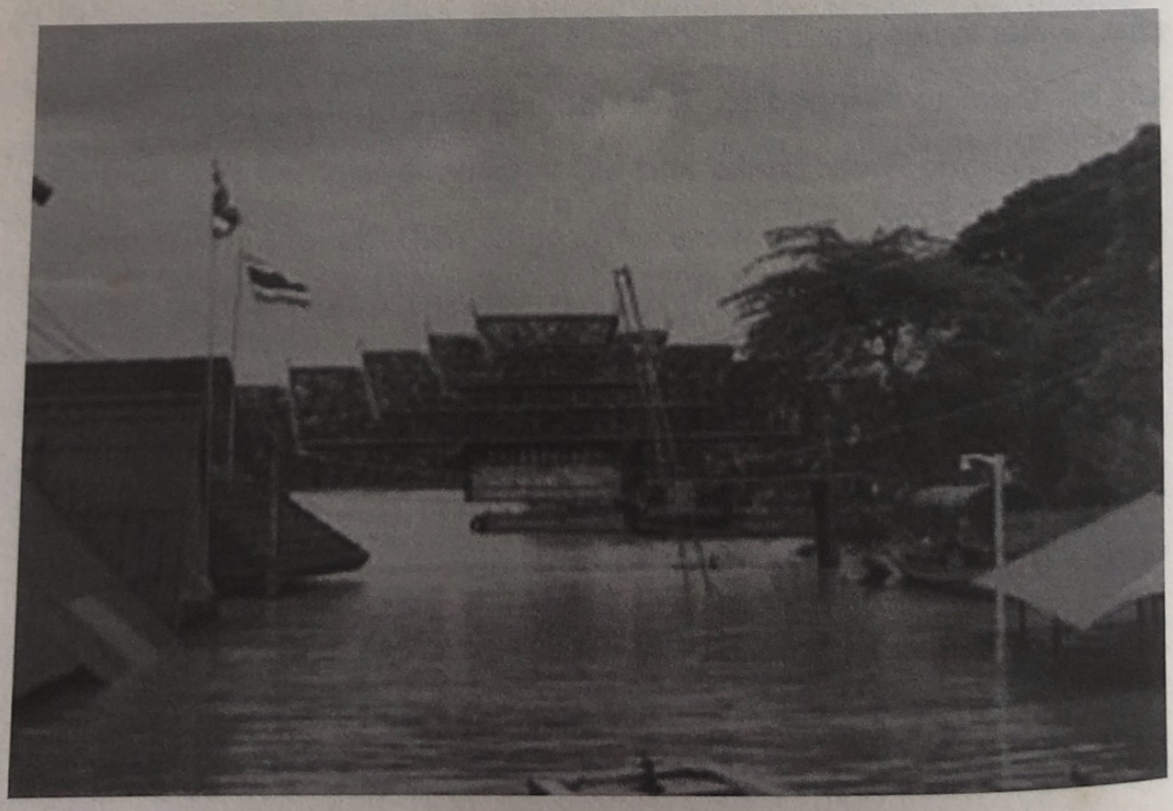
resulted from the opening of the Jinhong Dam.Figure 6 Flooded Areas in Chiang Saen, Chiang Khong, and Wiang Kaen in 2008

Local people were not ready to respond to the flooding. In the past, water levels gradually increased, but that time, they rose too rapidly for them to respond to. This flooding damaged agricultural areas on the Mekong River banks and led to bank erosion so that animals, residences, and roads were affected. The Chinese government stated in the newspaper that it had not released water to flood Thailand or Lao, reasoning that the dams were able to receive water but did not deny that it had opened the dam and that no one could stop raining in the upstream part of the dam. For this reason, it is questioned if it is time to reconsider economically-based development as it has destroyed a lot of natural resources and communities and to study who will compensate for the damages to the local people and communities. It is not responsibilities of the Thai government

for spending taxes of Thais to compensate for the local people. It is also questioned who benefits from this. Is it China or the investors that uses electricity for industries? This is a proof that any actions without respecting the ecological system or nature seriously will cause damage to communities living in the Mekong Basin. A preliminary survey on the effects of the flooding in the upper northern Thailand has shown that the estimated damage cost was not lower than 85 million baht, not including the effects in the Northeast of Thailand and Lao, which were effected similarly.

During the past 50 years, the water level of the Mekong River reached the lowest point on 27th February 2010 at the Chiang Khong Station, which was 0.36 m. On 28th February 2010, it rapidly increased by 0.20 m. to 0.56 m. although there was no rain in the area and there was no report of rain at the upstream areas. The water

Figure 8 Flooding at Dan Tha Ruea Chiang Khong Port in 2009



level remained constant until March, and they rose into 1.12 m. on 13th March 2010 and then decreased. The increasing water was not turbid whilst water that flows from the north is turbid. On the contrary, in February 2010, the water level of the Salaween River, which also originates in Himalayan mountain ranges and has no dam, gradually reduced and had more abundant water. The answer of the governor of the Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture to the governor of Chiang Rai about drought downstream areas in China: "There is a need to store water in the reservoirs because Yunnan is very dry." has identified that unusual water fluctuations are mostly caused by the opening and closing of dams in China.

However, some Chinese senior officers and Thai ministers and senior officers claimed that the phenomenon was a result of global drought or global warming. The Thai People's Network for Mekong argued that dams in the Mekong River aggravated the water crisis at downstream areas and questioned if letting the Mekong River flow freely and not blasting rapids in the Mekong River as natural dams will be better. Academics and senior officers of China and Thailand as well as the Mekong River Basin Commission (MRC) have claimed that only 16% of water in China comes from the Mekong River (Lao 35%, Myanmar Thailand 18%, Cambodia 18%, and Vietnam 11%). Actually, this amount is the average annual figure and was derived from the measurement at the estuary of the Mekong River that releases into the South China Sea in Vietnam. According to a database of the MRC, water, especially in Chiang Saen, Chiang Khong, and Wiang Kaen accounts for 95% and 75% during the dry and wet season respectively (see the Comparison Chart). This is a major reason why people in the areas have confirmed this fact that unusual water fluctuations are caused by the opening and

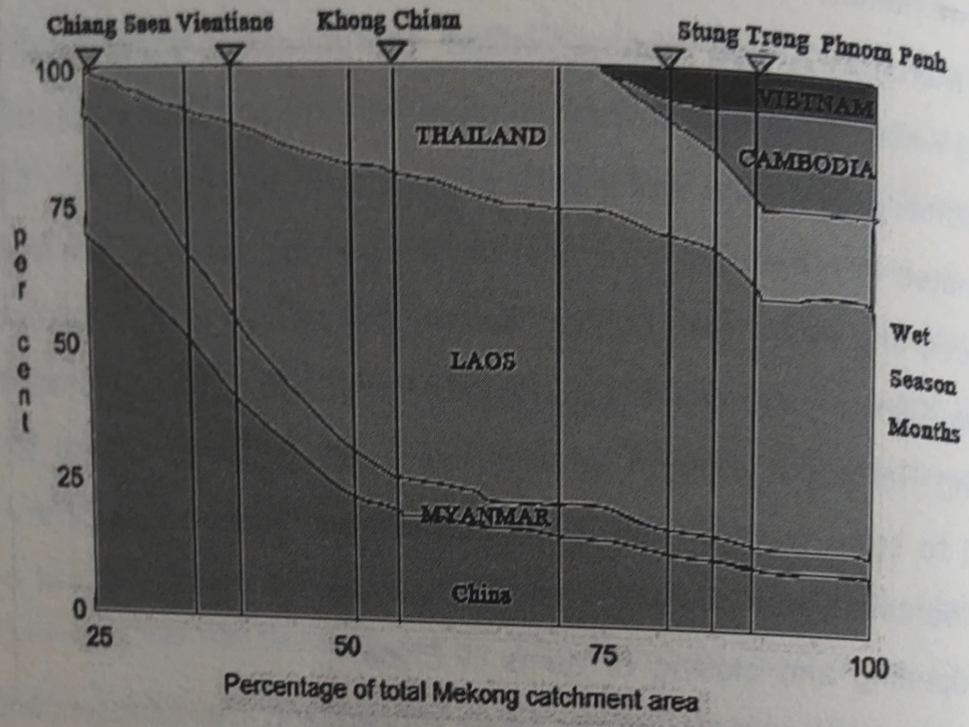


Figure 9 Quantity of Water during the Wet Season

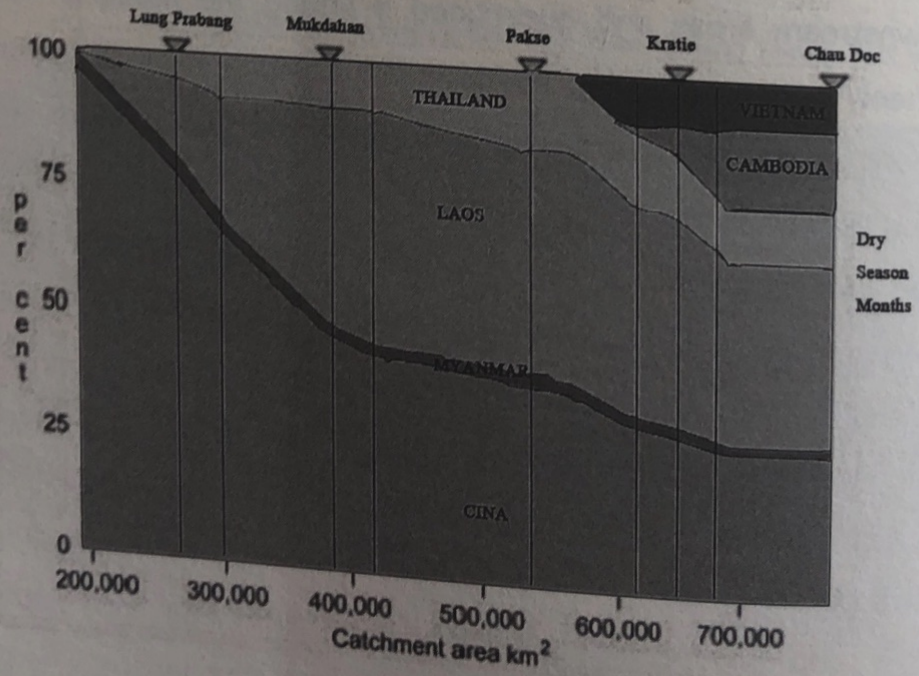


Figure 10 Quantity of Water during the Dry Season

closing of dams of China because China is located the nearest to their areas, and there is no water recharge from large tributaries.

This water crisis for the past 50 years has substantially affected fishery, agriculture, transportation, and tourism of people in downstream areas and confirmed the lesson of the flood crisis in August 2008 that 'Dams cannot prevent flooding and aggravate it during the dry season', which the claim "The dam prevents dryness in downstream areas during the dry season and prevents flooding during the flood season" is not true and should be no longer adhered to. Actually, the dams were designed to produce power to feed industrial zones in the east of China and transfer it to industrial cities of Thailand, which is driving the free market system to reach the 'open socialist economy'.

The Mekong dam projects and the Mekong rapids blasting project are good examples of trans-state natural resources management for the Mekong Basin, which are beneficial lessons for local communities on the Mekong River banks and Thailand and for studying the knowledge of Mekong natural resources management. If people do not want to learn or realize the impacts of the preeminent economic and political system on the cultural ecological system oriented to the self-reliance community economy, there will be a risk of competing for natural resources in the future.

Cultural Ecology - based Natural Resources Management and Lessons and Self - adjustment of Local Communities

This event caused the alert of local people and people organizations at the end of the Ing - Kok Basin and the Mekong River banks. For example, the Rak Chiang Khong Conservation Group, which has carried out environmental activities in Chaing Khong District since 1992, the Natural Resources Conservation Club for the End of the Ing River, which was established in 2000, and the River and Community Project, which was founded in 1999, formed the Mekong - Lanna Natural Resources and Culture Conservation Network.

Learning that the Chinese government was blasting the Mekong rapids, local people became anxious and gathered to request relevant information and transparency of the project. After that, they coordinated with local organizations, NGOs, mass media, academics, and the government sector in charge of security and politics to share opinions and request the consideration of prospective problems through restudying environmental impacts. China had prepared reports on environmental impacts, which was like a manual of Mekong rapids blasting, but not on ecological, social or cultural impacts. Thus, the Chinese government ordered the preparation of the reports on environmental, social, and cultural impacts again, and the Network and local people also did research called 'villager's research' to study the importance of the Mekong ecological systems from the Golden Triangle to Pha Dai, especially Khon Phi Long, and possible cultural, social and economic impacts of the Mekong rapids blasting.

The research which local people did with the Network and

NGOs was the first research with management of knowledge or collective knowledge of the local people. Their study framework is cultural ecology. The research results were applied to campaign for collective learning of the local people and organizations and to propose policy-level suggestions to the public in case of the Mekong rapids blasting.

Another lesson is that the community-based research "History of Chiang Khong-Wiang Kaen: Marginal Society amidst Economic and Political Changes in the Greater Mekong Sub-region", which stresses the knowledge management from insiders' views and creates the confidence of local people and organizations that they can manage knowledge on their own. The study process of local people in conjunction with academics renders knowledge connecting to realities of the local communities, links a large number of people to share their ideas, and graft the study results onto other studies.

The Network and local people have applied knowledge from previous studies and work on projects of development or conservation of natural resources in local communities to create the concreteness of their self-adjustment and self-reliance through knowledge management or villager's research to explore shared knowledge or existing capital to apply for working, e.g. Project "Rehabilitation of Local Communities at the End of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River Banks" for 14 communities on the Mekong River banks and Nam Ing Plains or ethic minority groups on the mountains to create the concreteness of management of community forests, management of fish conservation zones, cultural revival, tourism management by community, and improvement of area conditions. At present, the Network works in 39 communities in Chiang Saen, Chiang Khong, Khun Tan, Thoeng, and Wiang Kaen District. The Network set up 23 fish conservation parks in the Ing and Mekong Basin and 19 community forests and promotion of the Cow Fund in community forests

to serve as firebreaks or to manage forest fire (This is applying the cultural ecology concept. Whilst government agencies protect forests from fire using firebreaks and hire people to manage this. Local people use cows they raise in community forests to protect forests from forest fire. That is, cows eat grass in the forests, and people looking after the cows guard the forests. At Ban Huai Khu and a couple of villages, this method was adopted a couple of years ago for forest fire protection. In addition, cows have economic value or are a mobile bank of local people. This deals with ecologically-based natural resources management in a sustainable manner, which has contributed to economic enhancement for the local communities.) Besides, the Network has grafted the ideas on the work about self-reliance community economy on the basis of on natural resources

Figure 11 Villagers Catching Fish in the Ing River in a Permitted Fishery during the Dry Season

and cultural management, e.g. artificial insemination and breeding fish from the conservation zones for selling baby fish and releasing them into the river.

Apart from raising cows to deal with forest fire with the cultural ecology, there are three case studies at the end of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River banks which apply cultural ecology knowledge to natural resources management.

1) Buat Wang Sa-nguan or setting up of aquatic animal conservation zones using the knowledge of lang or luang, which is a common fishery of people living on both sides of the Mekong River. Local people use abandoned reservation parks or fish parks where it is believed to have otters, which local people call phi ngueak, as permanent reservation parks (as the habitats or spawning grounds of fish) and use other fish parks in the communities for catching fish. After studying lang-luang or fish parks together, they have a meeting to talk and draft rules on protecting the parks together. Some take a study trip. Those violating the rules will be punished by the committee set up in the meeting among all people in the community. After that, they appoint an auspicious day for organizing the Buat Wang Sa-nguan involving priest ceremonies and feasts. In almost all reservation parks, the Buat Wang Sa-nguan is held almost every year, depending on readiness of people in community. At present, apart from the Ing and Mekong River in Thailand, the Buat Wang Sa-nguan or setting up aquatic animal conservation zones are done in Lao by communities on the river banks, e.g. Ban Ton Phueng , Muang Ton Phueng, and Ban Pak Ngao in Lam Nam Ngao, Bo Kaeo Province and over 10 places in other provinces.

2) Buat Pa or setting up community forests using villager's research for surveying forests and plants or knowledge management to reveal the importance of remaining forests. After that, they apply beliefs or ordination to perform the ceremony for forest conservation

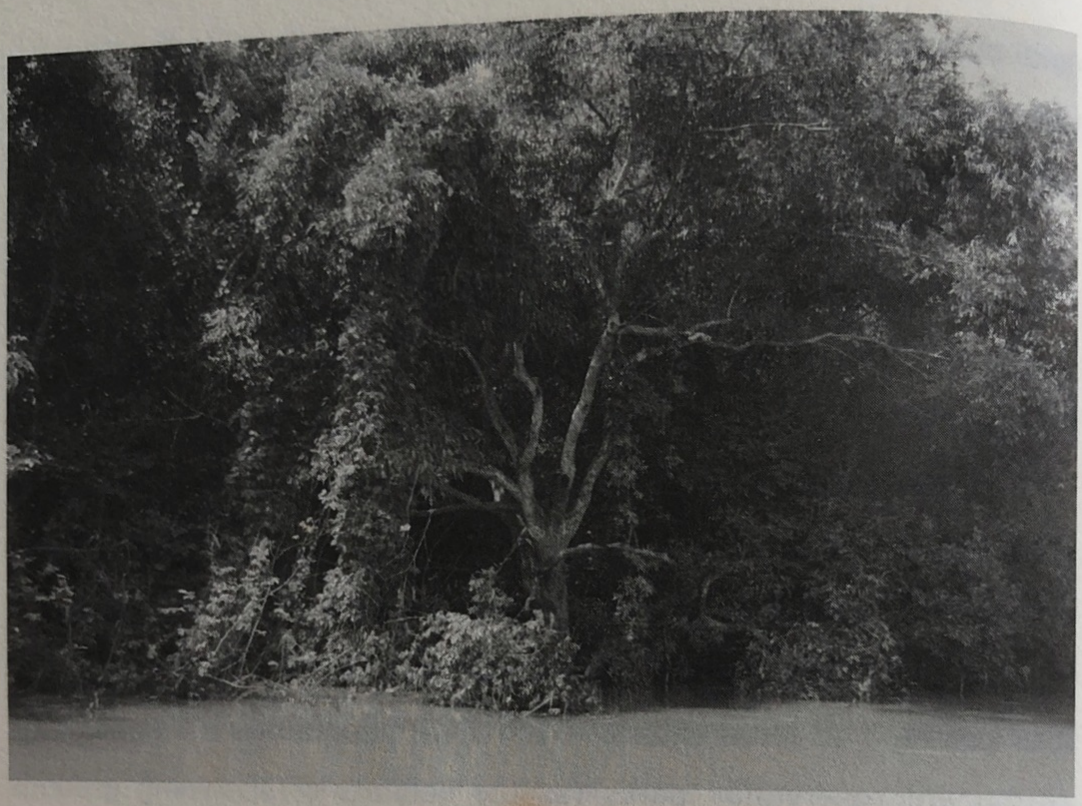


Figure 12 Community Forests in the Ing River Areas during the Flood Season

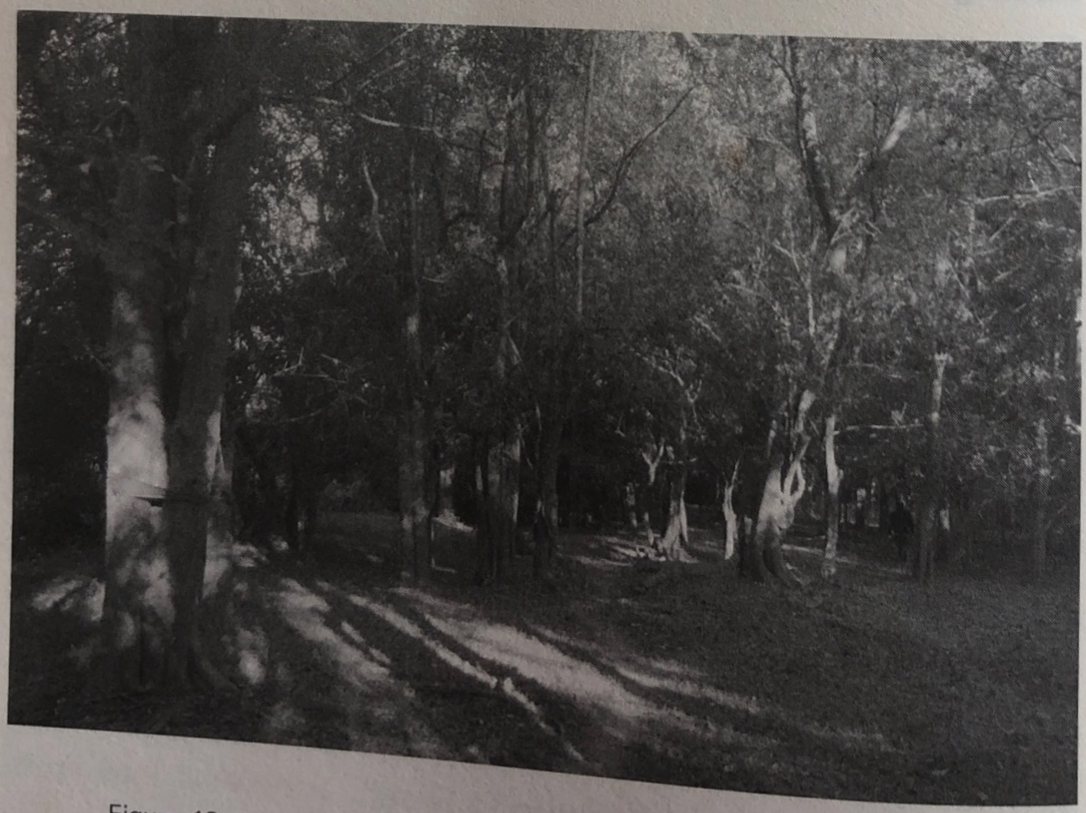


Figure 13 Community Forests in the Ing River Areas during the Dry Season

or consultation for setting community forests. Many communities start from the problems of swamp dryness and scarce forest areas. Some leaders have a meeting to discuss the importance of forests. Some take a study trip and then have a meeting to set up the committee on looking after forests in community. After that, they apply Buddhist rituals and beliefs to Buat Pa. Mostly, communities setting up community forests using knowledge management or studying on the significance of forests and wildlife form a group before they can realize forest conservation in terms of exploitation and protection as the saying 'Eating from forests, ones should look after forests and eating from water, ones should look after water.' The communities setting up community forests without collective knowledge management mostly view conservation areas as areas where local people cannot exploit or benefit from forests or determination of zones or types of resources that can or cannot be used. That is, they view conservation areas as forbidden areas.

3) The Mekong giant cat fish is a good example of a failure in economically-based natural resources management. One hundred years ago, fishermen caught the Mekong giant cat fish after requesting phi lung. After catching a Mekong giant cat fish, they shared it with other people within his village. Later, there was a value that eating a Mekong giant cat fish makes ones clever as Khongbeng. When tourism was heavily promoted, Mekong giant cat fish became more expensive. Therefore, fishermen caught Mekong giant cat fish for selling. The Department of Fisheries issued a law against catching Mekong giant cat fish. The law stipulates that those who want to catch them shall request a prospecting license from the Department and catching the Mekong giant cat fish shall be done for breeding and releasing to rivers or canals and dams or reservoirs of the Department of Fisheries and for selling to aquaculture ponds in the business sector. The fishermen have been forced by natural

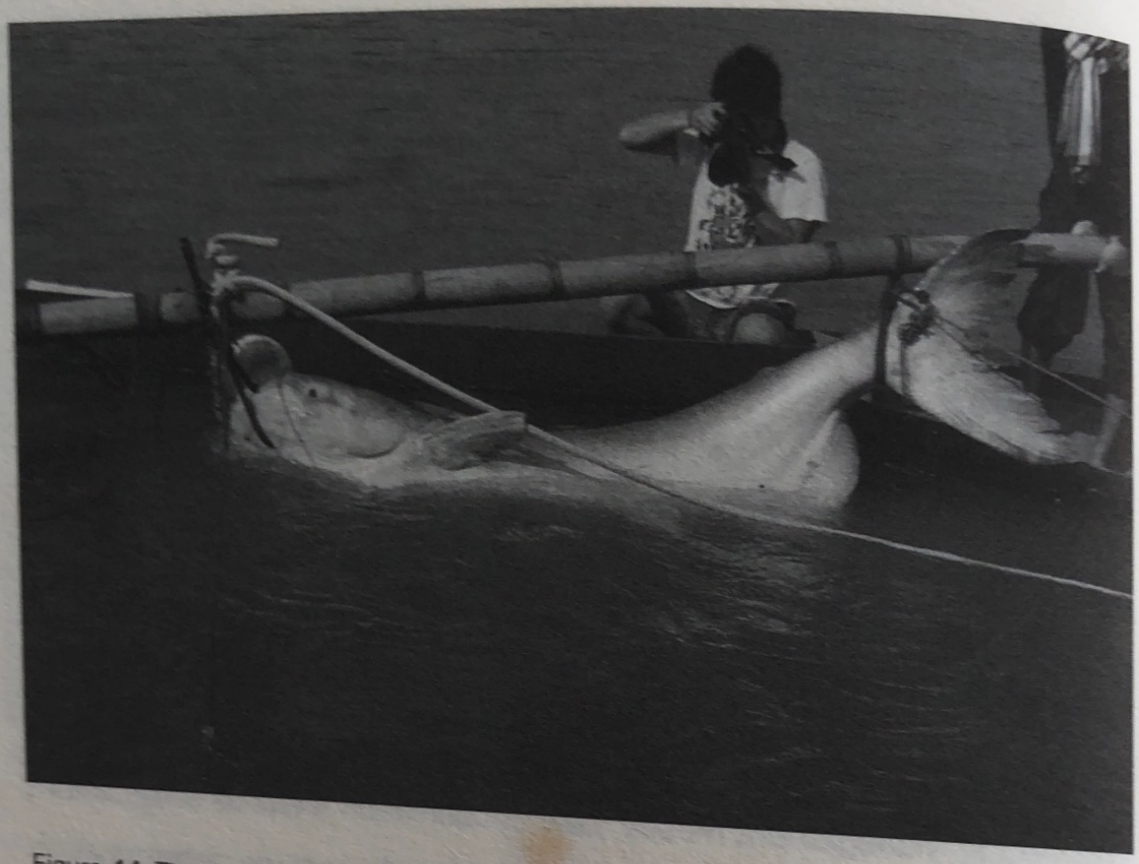


Figure 14 The Only Mekong Giant Cat Fish Caught in 2009 – The Japanese journalist was interested in this news as in previous years.

resources management of the government; however, the government has never educated them about management of the fish. Viewing that Mekong giant cat fish are endangered animals, the government has prohibited the fishermen from catching them. However, the extinction of the large-scale fish is caused by various factors.

The first main reason is that the ecological system should suit Mekong giant cat fish. Accordingly, the top priority is to think that Mekong giant cat fish will not disappear from the Mekong River if the ecological system is not destroyed, and rocks should enable fish to live. The next one is to think about how to make the local people who are hunters become conservationists for the Mekong giant cat fish and Mekong River and to lead their living with the river without the separation between fishermen and water or between fish and the ecological system so that fishermen's survival signifies

fish and ecological systems' survival. The contributive factors have relations as a cultural ecology, in which the living of people and rivers cannot be separated. This matter is like chasing people out of the forest. Therefore, it should be reconsidered that the ecological systems should be sustainable and must not be destroyed, and the local people should be upgraded to participate in natural resources management with ability to access information and manage knowledge by themselves.

Local people have knowledge of catching Mekong giant cat fish, but in terms of conservation. However, it should be considered how they can be involved in this. The Department of Fisheries has had local people catch Mekong giant cat fish for breeding to create knowledge for the Department itself, but local people have not known this before. Therefore, the Department of Fisheries should rethink. Actually, local people have been hunted and needed to request the prospecting license since 1990 despite the fact that they do not hunt Mekong giant cat fish all year round, but from late April - May because beyond this period, the fish will move to other channels. The Department of Fisheries should not deprive local people of the Mekong River but should make them live with the Mekong River and allow fish catching in the form of education and artificial insemination before releasing them to the Mekong River in order to create a cycle of sustainable conservation rendering benefits, reputation, and protection of the river. The local people know that if ecological systems are destroyed, fish cannot survive. They should be upgraded through research as to how they can survive so that they understand cultural ecology systems to result in sustainable development.

Today, if we talk about Mekong giant cat fish, we are more likely to think about Chiang Khong. It is questioned what we should do to benefit from this through tourism and education by changing the action of hunting to the action of tourism and establishing a

museum and hiring local people that are Mekong giant cat fish hunters to be speakers in the museum. This is an example of the concept of natural resources management through case studies of Mekong giant cat fish catching. This deals with community-based management, which involves the collection, analysis, and synthesis of local knowledge to gain collective knowledge in combination of outside knowledge which is in accordance with the collective knowledge; practice; and review of lessons to solve problems and graft their ideas onto further work. This is participatory cultural ecology -based knowledge management. The previous operations of the Mekong-Lanna Natural Resources and Culture Conservation Network involved knowledge management with the following strategies, which are important and in accordance with the cultural ecology.

1) Exploring and creating local consciousness – In terms of natural resources, there should be a reduction in the dependence on external factors supported by the government policies, limitation of development of infrastructure affecting the ecological system and local culture, and elevation of local knowledge of all aspects as local school curriculum which children can learn before learning the comprehensive view of society.

2) Creating the concreteness of the conservation of natural resources and local culture – Local communities should be encouraged to formulate conservation plans and determine areas for displaying local cultural works in terms of thinking and forms, starting from local people's participation.

3) Respecting diversity – It should be accepted that Thailand is a combination of people. Local people should be encouraged to have participation in determining national and international policies.

4) Respecting locality and human equality – Local people should be allowed to access information of policies affecting their natural resources and cultures equally.

However, it must be accepted that problems in the Mekong River are common problems of all people and communities in the Mekong Basin. There should be integration of knowledge and man-power of each local community to solve the problems and to manage natural resources in a sustainable manner through setting up the Mekong People Assembly to work on policies and other relevant issues. In the past, the network of villagers on the Mekong River banks in the northern and northeastern region as well as network of people in the central and southern region participated in solving the problems and helped one another to cope with the erosion of the Mekong River banks as a result of the dams and Mekong rapids blasting. As a gift to the Thai government, the United Nations (UN), and the Chinese government (See Appendix 1), they planted markers and added soil to prevent the erosion of the Mekong River banks at Ban Pak Ing Tai, Chiang Khong District, Chiang Rai from 25-27 April 2009. This was sharing ideas and working that may lead to the Mekong Basin People Assembly in the future.

In addition, they had a meeting with community representatives from 85 sub-districts in six provinces on the Mekong River banks in northeastern Thailand. Most agreed with participatory management of cultural ecology knowledge in Thailand before presenting to the government at the policy level about what and how people living on the Mekong River banks want before attracting world organizations' attention to people living on the Mekong riverbanks.

Primary Proposals to the Thai Government and Transnational Organizations

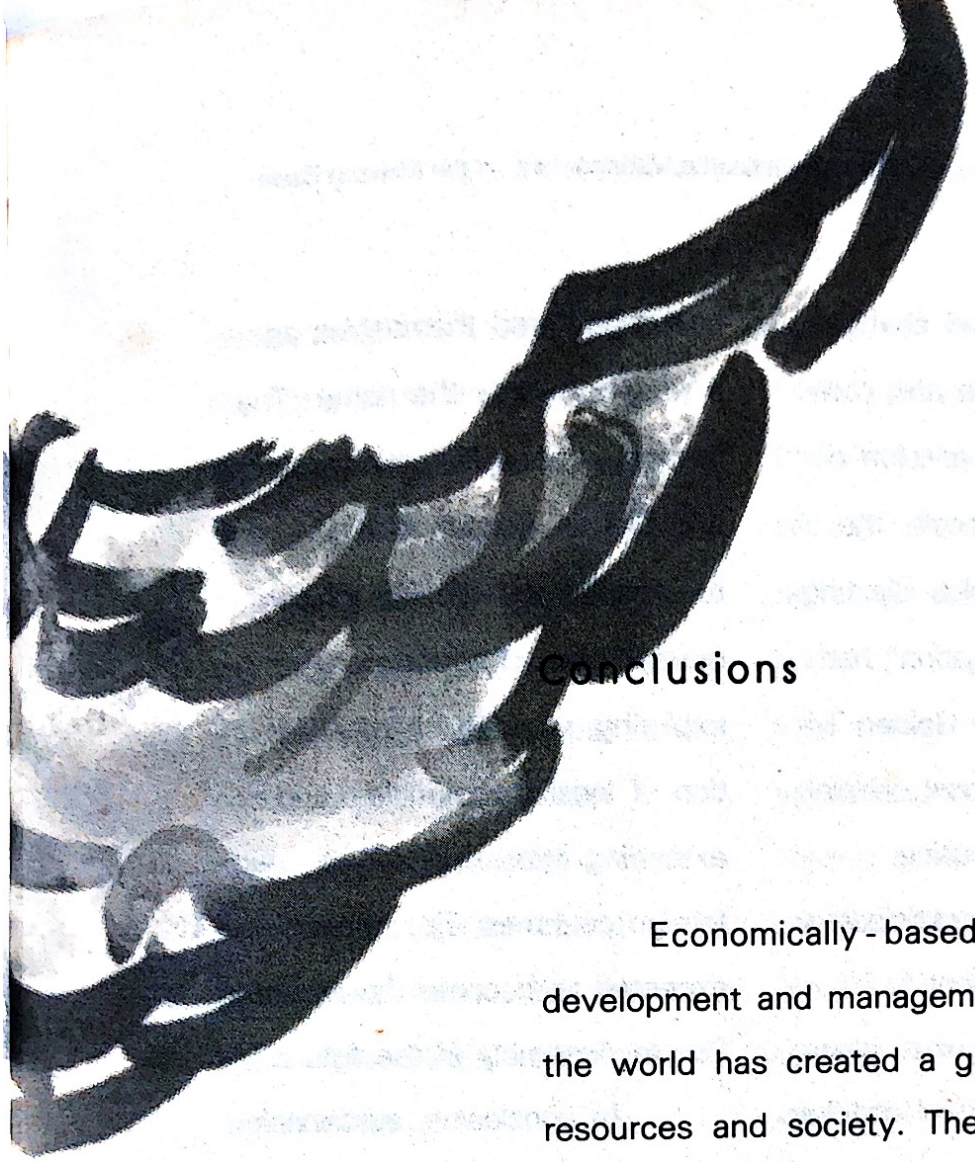
Proposals to the State

It is the time that the Thai state and governmental organizations to learn and respect local people and the knowledge of local people, who have been always marginal people of the country, and to understand and cope with problems or construction of development projects based on honoring local communities with transparency and local community participation of all levels and steps.

The government should promote participatory management of cultural ecology knowledge and develop the results and guidelines on research or collective knowledge management of local communities, local agencies, and local people networks working on rehabilitation of local cultural ecology based on collective knowledge management because cultural ecology is a significant common point that enables local communities to rely on themselves and is a source of food security, which is sovereignty of people and the state since it is related to the security of the territory. Related to the physical location of the Mekong River, Thailand should create an understanding of strengthening border communities in all aspects to make them ready to respond to the Chinesization over the GMS and globalization because the strength of marginal local communities or other local communities in Thailand is the strength of the state.

Proposals for Transnational Organizations

As the Mekong River is an international river, any actions within the sovereignty of any states can be taken so long as they do not affect local communities and other states. Before any state does any actions on Mekong River, it shall listen to the voice of local communities and respect local communities and other states. In addition, Mekong River-related transnational organizations and world organization, e.g. MRC, GMS, ACMEC, or UN need to cooperate or act as the mediator to manage benefits of different states in the Mekong River equally in consideration of the costs of natural resources and culture of local communities in the Mekong River that would be lost or affected by development and cooperative strategies focused on benefits of the state capitalists, international capitalists, or the mainstream economy and politics and passing on the burden of the costs of natural resources and cultures to local communities, poor or marginal people because in each state, local communities or people in general have no voice in making policy decisions at the state or trans-state level. Therefore, promotion of participatory democracy should result in truly democratic work culture on the basis of cultural ecology-based natural resources management.



Conclusions

Economically-based natural resources development and management of Thailand and the world has created a great loss to natural resources and society. The burden and costs of hardship have been on local people and communities as in the case of the Mekong Basin in the north of Thailand or end of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River banks. For example, the Mekong rapids blasting for commercial navigation and Upper Mekong dam construction resulted in unseasonable tides, destruction of ecological systems in the Mekong River, reduction in fish and plant species, erosion of the Mekong River banks, emergence of sand bars so that water channels changed, aridity during the dry season, and flash flood due to opening of the dams. The incident in August 2008 caused a loss of not lower than 85 million baht.

The effects and changes made the local people and communities request the revision of the projects. For example, the Project "Mekong Rapids Blasting for Commercial Navigation" had to be stopped at the Golden Triangle. Furthermore, local people adjusted themselves using villager's research or participatory knowledge management to explore the common aims, areas, or knowledge of cul-tural ecology and developed it for management of natural resources and cultures through, for example, Buat Wang Sa-nguan to set up as aquatic animals conservation zones, Buat Pa to set up community forests and wet forests, raising cows to deal with forest fire, and artificial insemination of local fish to release into the Mekong River and create supplementary incomes.

Furthermore, local people living at the end of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River banks gathered themselves as a network under the name "The Mekong-Lanna Natural Resources and Culture Conservation Network" to organize the process of combining knowledge and people, exploring, working on rehabilitation of local communities, and extending it to other regions and foreign countries. The network is expected to become the Mekong People Assembly in the future.

In conclusion, sustainable natural resources development or management is a process within individuals and local communities mixed with external factors which make them understand the past, present, and future with participatory knowledge management to find the common points or co-living between men and nature, between men and men, and between men and the supernatural to render equity and peace with mutual respect.

External factors, especially the government, should respect,

understand, realize, and promote the rights of local communities and the management of natural resources and cultures based on cultural ecology knowledge thoroughly and continually. The government should protect local communities from adverse impacts of economically-based development policies of the government, trans-state government organizations, and world organizations.

The Thai government should be active and support local communities for weaving collective knowledge of cultural ecology; should play a role of protecting local communities from any actions impacting their cultural ecology and food security, which has relations with the state security; and should push the agenda on cultural ecology-based natural resources management in the GMS and world forums.

Finally, the article "Local Cultural Ecology and Management of Natural Resources in the Mekong Basin" of the Chiang Khong Conservation Group presents problems, impacts, lessons, and proposals that should be comprehended through local cultural ecology views distilled from villager's research, community-based research, publications, and practices about local community rehabilitation to allow knowledge sharing, real practices, and idea grafting in the future. It is also expected to seek ways to manage natural resources and culture in an equitable and sustainable manner in order to render peaceful co-living of people in all societies, countries, and the world.

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Appendix

Open letter

On the occasion of planting markers and adding soil
to prevent the erosion of the Mekong River banks
Ban Pak Ing Tai, Chiang Khong District, Chiang Rai
25-27 April 2009

First Gift to the Thai Government

Before being the gift

For almost two decades, amidst the development current of GMS countries, comprising China, Myanmar, Lao, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, there have been a lot of economy development projects, such as the project of constructing eight Upper Mekong hydropower dams in Yunnan (three have been in service), the project of the Mekong rapids blasting for commercial navigation, and the ASEAN - China Free Trade Project. These development projects have greatly impacted the local people living on the Mekong River banks, especially in the north of Thailand – Chiang Saen, Chiang Khong, and Wiang Kaen District in Chiang Rai Province. The stream current in the Mekong River has changed because of the opening and closing of the dams for commercial navigation and for releasing flood at the upstream part of the dams. In addition, the change in the direction of the stream current after the Mekong rapids blasting above the Golden Triangle made the stream flow so strongly that many ten rai of land on both banks of the Mekong River eroded. All these have made the lifestyle of people living on the Mekong River banks almost collapse because fish species have decreased and agricultural areas on the Mekong River banks have been flooded so that food security and land on the riverbanks partly disappear.

and some communities have to evacuate to other areas and many had to change a job.

From 9-15 August 2008, the heaviest flooding for a 40-year period occurred at the end of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River banks. This disaster was mainly caused by an immediate opening of a dam in China as there had been heavy flooding at its upstream part. It was officially reported by the Chinese government that there were 40 deaths and many thousands of people had to evacuate from the disaster-prone areas. Flash flood for only one day could make the water in the Mekong River rise to almost two meters and intrude the Ing and Kok River, its tributaries, for almost 30 km. This created a great damage to agricultural areas, domestic animals, residences, and shoreline land. After the water levels decreased on 15 August 2008, the damage cost was primarily estimated to be over 85 million baht.

After the heavy flooding, the Network of Villagers at the End of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River Banks helped to recover local areas on the Mekong River banks as best as they could through rehabilitation of occupations and the grain and animal fund. A great deal of land on the Mekong River banks in Thailand lost with the stream current, e.g. at Ban Huai Luek and Ban Pak Ing Tai. The aids by the government came to the area late. With concern, love, and attachment to their native land, the Network of Villagers at the End of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River Banks in conjunction with local administrative organization and the Mekong-Lanna Natural Resources and Culture Conservation Network planted markers and added soil to prevent the erosion of the Mekong River banks at Ban Pak Ing Tai, Chiang Khong District, Chiang Rai

from 25-27 April 2009.

People from the Save Bangkok Sea and Environment Network; Thai Nationality Reinstatement Network (or the Displaced Thai Network), Ranong and Prachuap Khiri Khan Province; the Phuket Rights of the Poor Network, Phuket Province; the Community Network, Phang-nga Province, Phichit Gold-mining Affected People Network; Project for Songkhla Lake Revival; Ban Koum Dam Construction Affected People Network; Lanta Island Revival Network; Group 'Love Our Home, Phayao, Livable City'; Faith Community Network in Southern Border Provinces; Tsunami Victim Network; Chiang Mai Urban Community Organization Network; Ubon Urban Community Organization Network; Mekong Right Lover Group; and the Living River Siam Project cooperated to create a river bank protection for the Mekong River to show the power of self-reliance of small people, who have had never been paid serious attention by the government, and to be a Lanna New Year gift to the Thai government, who will receive it consciously and will pay attention to local communities living on the Mekong River banks which have been affected by GMS development policies.

First Gift to the Thai Government

This gift is delivered to the Thai government to remind that it is time for the Thai government, especially the government under the administration of Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva, to realize and reconsider policies and work on helping local areas affected by because local communities are the foundation of national security. If the land and lifestyles of marginal people on the Mekong River banks collapse, how can the country survive? Previous development policies in the GMS countries can be said to let the country lose food sovereignty and state sovereignty.

Furthermore, this gift is delivered to remind that from now on, the Thai government shall have development policies and plans on honoring poor people and marginal people, respecting, and supporting local communities in Thailand to strengthen them. When villager's network or local communities gather to depend on themselves, the government needs to support them. The government policies should not only grant privileges or opportunities to Trans National Capitalist but also respect nature and human equality because the development with respect for nature and faith in human equality will lead to peace and security of the nation.

With respect for nature and
faith in human equality

First Gift to the UN

Before being the gift

The Mekong River is an international river of six countries, namely China, Myanmar, Lao, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. All the countries have a right to exploit the river equally whilst they shall not violate the right of the other countries. They also have a right to protect it so that they can share it sustainably.

However, for almost two decades amidst the development of GMS countries, there have been a lot of projects, most of which were heavily supported by the Chinese government in order to develop the west region of China, which is Yunnan, and to intrude the markets southwards, which are ASEAN countries. Most projects supported by China ignore and deprive the right of downstream countries and are focused on economic benefits through exploiting natural resources of other countries in the Mekong River but ignore the protection of the Mekong River so that it can be used sustainably. The Chinese government views that the Upper Mekong from Tibet to Sipsong Panna is under the sovereignty of China, where it can take any actions.

These development projects have greatly impacted the local people living on the Mekong River banks, especially in the north of Thailand – Chiang Saen, Chiang Khong, and Wiang Kaen District in Chiang Rai Province. The stream current in the Mekong River has

changed because of the opening and closing of the dams for commercial navigation and for releasing flood at the upstream part of the dams. In addition, the change in the direction of the stream current after the Mekong rapids blasting above the Golden Triangle made the stream flow so strongly that many ten rai of land on both banks of the Mekong River eroded. All these have made the lifestyle of people living on the Mekong River banks almost collapse because fish species have decreased and agricultural areas on the Mekong River banks have been flooded so that food security and land on the riverbanks partly disappear, and some communities have to evacuate to other areas and many had to change a job.

From 9-15 August 2008, the heaviest flooding for a 40-year period occurred at the end of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River banks. This disaster was mainly caused by an immediate opening of a dam in China as there had been heavy flooding at its upstream part. It was officially reported by the Chinese government that there were 40 deaths and many thousands of people had to evacuate from the disaster-prone areas. Flash flood for only one day could make the water in the Mekong River rise to almost two meters and intrude the Ing and Kok River, its tributaries, for almost 30 km. This created a great damage to agricultural areas, domestic animals, residences, and shoreline land. After the water levels decreased on 15 August 2008, the damage cost was primarily estimated to be over 85 million baht.

After the heavy flooding, the Network of Villagers at the End of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River Banks helped to recover local areas on the Mekong River banks as best as they could through rehabilitation of occupations and the grain and animal fund. A great

deal of land on the Mekong River banks in Thailand lost with the stream current, e.g. at Ban Huai Luek and Ban Pak Ing Tai. The aids by the government came to the area late. With concern, love, and attachment to their native land, the Network of Villagers at the End of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River Banks in conjunction with local administrative organization and the Mekong-Lanna Natural Resources and Culture Conservation Network planted markers and added soil to prevent the erosion of the Mekong River banks at Ban Pak Ing Tai, Chiang Khong District, Chiang Rai from 25-27 April 2009.

People from the Save Bangkok Sea and Environment Network; Thai Nationality Reinstatement Network (or the Displaced Thai Network), Ranong and Prachuap Khiri Khan Province; the Phuket Rights of the Poor Network, Phuket Province; the Community Network, Phang-nga Province, Phichit Gold-mining Affected People Network; Project for Songkhla Lake Revival; Ban Koum Dam Construction Affected People Network; Lanta Island Revival Network; Group 'Love Our Home, Phayao, Livable City'; Faith Community Network in Southern Border Provinces; Tsunami Victim Network; Chiang Mai Urban Community Organization Network; Ubon Urban Community Organization Network; and Mekong Right Lover Group cooperated to create a river bank protection for the Mekong River to be the power of self-reliance of small people and repay for love for the Mekong River and natural resources to show that local communities and community organizations networks in Thailand consuming water in the Mekong River will protect the Mekong River as an international river, not a river of a single country, so that it can be used perpetually.

First Gift to the UN

This gift is delivered to the UN to remind that it is time for the UN to realize and reconsider policies of each GMS country for sustainable and equitable natural resources management, especially the work on helping local areas affected by development policies among GMS countries. The UN should attach great importance to local communities all over the world, not only to the coordination between government organizations and the government. This is because local communities are the foundation of national security. If the land and lifestyles of marginal people on the Mekong River banks collapse, how can the countries survive? If the effects of development of the government in the Mekong River still go one, who will know that one day, there will be a severe war of competing for natural resources in the Mekong River? Respecting the right and not violating the rights of upstream and downstream countries and managing natural resources in the Mekong River in a sustainable and equitable manner are important things to which the UN and countries should attach great importance to enable people in the Mekong River to live together peacefully.

Furthermore, this gift is delivered to remind that from now on, the UN will be the mediator with development policies and plans on honoring poor people and marginal people, respecting, and supporting local communities in Thailand to strengthen them. When the villager's network or local communities gather to depend on themselves, the government of different nations and UN needs to support them. The UN policies should not only grant privileges or opportunities to Trans National Capitalist but also respect nature

and human equality because the development with respect for nature and faith in human equality will lead to peace and security of the nation and people in the Mekong River and our beloved world.

With respect for nature and
faith in human equality

Second Gift to the Chinese Government

Before being the gift

We, people who live on the Mekong River of Thailand and you, the Chinese Government whose people in Yunnan and the Tibet Autonomous Region share the Mekong River although they call it differently (Lancang or Khong River). It is the same river running between us with a good relationship. You and we know that the Mekong River is an international river of six countries, namely China, Myanmar, Lao, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam and that all the countries have a right to exploit the river equally but shall not violate the right of the other countries. They also have a right to protect the Mekong River so that they can share it sustainably.

However, for almost two decades, after you opened your country to the socialist marketing economy, you have headed to economic development to make your country become one of the world's leaders. You have expanded the marketing economy to the west, Yunnan, to be as prosperous as the east of China, especially through development in the Mekong River. You have invested in the development of hydropower dams to produce electricity in the Mekong River. Although you view that the Mekong in your area is within your sovereignty, under which you can do anything. However, you know that streams flow downwards and the Mekong River connects

to our nation and other downstream countries. As for your plan to construct eight hydropower dams in the upper Mekong River (three of them have been in service), have you ever thought how people downstream would be affected?

Furthermore, as for the Mekong rapids blasting for navigation, of which you are the major supporter, although it was stopped at the Golden Triangle, it has had a lot of effects on us. We used to deliver this gift on 24 April 2005 to your Mekong survey group. Including the ASEAN-China Free Trade Project and 11 dam projects in the Lower Mekong River, the hardship of people living downstream is becoming more severe.

These development projects have greatly impacted the local people living on the Mekong River banks. The stream current in the Mekong River has changed because of the opening and closing of the dams for commercial navigation and for releasing flood at the upstream part of the dams. In addition, the change in the direction of the stream current after the Mekong rapids blasting above the Golden Triangle made the stream flow so strongly that many ten rai of land on both banks of the Mekong River eroded. All these have caused a decrease in fish species and flooding in agricultural areas on the Mekong River banks so that food security and land on the riverbanks partly disappear, and some communities have to evacuate to other areas and many had to change a job. All these made the lifestyles of people living on the Mekong River banks almost collapse.

From 9-15 August 2008, the heaviest flooding for a 40-year period occurred at the end of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River banks. This disaster was mainly caused by an immediate

opening of a dam in China as there had been heavy flooding at its upstream part. It was officially reported by the Chinese government that there were 40 deaths and many thousands of people had to evacuate from the disaster-prone areas. You love your people as we do for our people, but releasing water out of the dam immediately without advanced notification makes your claim that you always state "The dam prevents dryness in downstream areas during the dry season and prevents flooding during the flood season" a lie.

Flash flood for only one day could make the water in the Mekong River rise to almost two meters and intrude the Ing and Kok River, its tributaries, for almost 30 km. This created a great damage to agricultural areas, domestic animals, residences, and shoreline land. After the water levels decreased on 15 August 2008, the damage cost was primarily estimated to be over 85 million baht. We are not sure if you can compensate for the damage and effects in the future.

After the heavy flooding, the Network of Villagers at the End of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River Banks helped to recover local areas on the Mekong River banks as best as they could through rehabilitation of occupations and the grain and animal fund. A great deal of land on the Mekong River banks in Thailand lost with the stream current, e.g. at Ban Huai Luek and Ban Pak Ing Tai. The aids by the government came to the area late. With concern, love, and attachment to their native land, the Network of Villagers at the End of the Ing-Kok Basin and the Mekong River Banks in conjunction with local administrative organization and the Mekong-Lanna Natural Resources and Culture Conservation Network planted markers and added soil to prevent the erosion of the Mekong

River banks at Ban Pak Ing Tai, Chiang Khong District, Chiang Rai from 25-27 April 2009.

People from the Save Bangkok Sea and Environment Network; Thai Nationality Reinstatement Network (or the Displaced Thai Network), Ranong and Prachuap Khiri Khan Province; the Phuket Rights of the Poor Network, Phuket Province; the Community Network, Phang-nga Province, Phichit Gold-mining Affected People Network; Project for Songkhla Lake Revival; Ban Koum Dam Construction Affected People Network; Lanta Island Revival Network; Group 'Love Our Home, Phayao, Livable City'; Faith Community Network in Southern Border Provinces; Tsunami Victim Network; Chiang Mai Urban Community Organization Network; Ubon Urban Community Organization Network; Mekong Right Lover Group; and the Living River Siam Project cooperated to create a river bank protection for the Mekong River to be the power of self-reliance of small people and to repay for love for the Mekong River and natural resources to show that local communities and community organizations networks in Thailand consuming water in the Mekong River will protect the Mekong River as an international river, not a river of a single country, so that it can be used perpetually.

Second Gift to the Chinese Government

This gift is delivered to you, the Chinese government to remind that it is the time for you, the Chinese government, to realize and reconsider your policies for developing the Mekong River, to listen to the voice of people living downstream for sustainable and equitable natural resources management, not to think that you can do anything on the river passing your country.

We would like to emphasize that the destruction of natural resources and lifestyle of local people for capitalists through construction of hydropower dams to generate electricity from Yunnan to the rich in the east of your country is betraying the principles of your Communist Party whose heart is on underprivileged people. Your people and people living downstream are human beings as the same. Hurting the Mekong River, which has been a refuge of over 100 million poor people for thousands years for the sake of capitalists or aristocracies, stresses that the human equality principle in the ideology of Communist Socialism no longer exists.

We would like to reemphasize that poor people and local communities are the foundation of security of the GMS countries and the world. If the land and lifestyles of marginal people on the Mekong River banks collapse, how can the GMS countries survive? If you do not review your previous development with inequality in the Mekong River but let the problems continue, who will guarantee that there will not be a severe war of competing for natural resources in the Mekong River? To respect the right and not to deprive the rights of upstream and downstream countries and managing natural resources in the Mekong River in a sustainable and equitable manner

are important things that the Chinese government and governments in GMS countries should realize so that people in the Mekong River can live together peacefully.

This gift is delivered to you to remind that if you do not review your policies that impact people who live downstream on the basis of nature and human equality respect-oriented development to render peace among people in the Mekong River, we will visit your embassy in all countries.

With respect for nature and
faith in human equality